



ODEI DONE: WHAT NOW?



ANIKA SULTANA | MERCURY STAFF

SB 17 went into effect on Jan. 1, dismantling UTD's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. The Office of Campus Resources and Support will replace it, although its specifics have yet to be announced.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion replaced with OCRS

NAVYA GRANDHE
Mercury Staff

UTD's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion is dismantled as of Dec. 31 and will now be replaced by the Office of Campus Resources and Support, or OCRS, in compliance with SB 17.

Under SB 17, universities in Texas are now banned from enforcing diversity statements in hiring procedures or providing faculty and staff with training on diversity and inclusion. In between legislative sessions, universities must also attest to the legislature that they are fully compliant, according to the *Texas Tribune*.

In place of ODEI, UTD has established the OCRS which was created Jan. 1, 2024, and is hosting its first event on Jan. 18, the annual Martin Luther King Jr. breakfast, featuring Dallas Mavericks CEO Cynt Marshall as guest speaker. The ODEI office used to encompass the Galerstein Gender Center, AccessAbility Resource Center and Multicultural Center. The GGC is now the Galerstein Community Center and the Multicultural Center is now the Comet Culture Center, Raul Hinojosa said in a December SG meeting. The Life Transitions Closet will still be accessible to students going through life transitions, but it's unclear what items might be prohibited from being distributed (e.g. chest binders). The Community Center will

be the centralized unit for all cultural celebrations and Heritage Month programs including Black History Month and Women's History Month. The AccessAbility Resource Center will still be available to students with disabilities fol-

“We're still here to educate people and promote our community no matter what. We refuse to forget who we are and assimilate, we refuse to let go of our culture.”

— Onyedi Ololo
President of ASU

lowing federal law.

Diversity programs and scholarships that are scrapped as of Jan. 1 include the Diversity Scholars Program, Women Leading in Diversity Program, Diversity Awards Program and Diversity Week.

Identity-based support groups and community-building activities that have been removed include the OUTter Space Support Group and Q-TEA – both LGBT support groups previously under the GCC.

The dismantling of ODEI has impacted numerous organizations on campus, including the African Student Union and the League of United Latin American Citizens, or LULAC. Alumnus Nathalia Patricio, former president of LULAC, said she hopes the organization will continue working with the national LULAC council to build a voice for the organization.

“I'm hoping that a lot will stay the same, we don't know what changes will be made to enforce this law,” Patricio said. “But we are hoping a lot of our events can go through the national LULAC council, separate from UTD.”

Biomedical engineering senior Onyedi Ololo, president of the ASU, said how coming together in times like these will strengthen communities' support for one another.

“I think a big thing is actively working to bring ourselves together,” Ololo said. “The Black organizations have gotten together to form the Black Organization Alliance to continue contributing to diversity on campus to help and to

SEE **OCRS**, PAGE 5

OCRS??

What's changing?

❌ Non-compliant DEI language + programs

→ DEI programs will remove these topics

→ Some programs will be discontinued

Galerstein Gender Center → **Galerstein Community Center**

Multicultural Center → **Comet Culture Center**

❌ Faculty job postings will not ask applicants about efforts to foster DEI values

* SB17-prohibited functions will be removed, but similar functions otherwise

What's staying?

✓ **JOBS!**

✓ **ARC!**

✓ **SERVICES** INCLUDING...

All ODEI staff will remain employed; staff may have altered job duties or roles

ARC + accommodations are not affected by SB17 + will continue usual functionality

Life Transitions Closet, Lactation Rooms, Scholars and Awards programs, cultural celebrations, etc.

ANIKA SULTANA | MERCURY STAFF

Texas bills bring uncertainty for immigrant students

SB 4 empowers law enforcement to take actions against those they suspect are undocumented, LULAC representatives said

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
News Editor

With the passing of SB 17, the Latino community at UTD will have to organize cultural celebrations and events with less support from their school, and with SB 4, law enforcement will be broadly empowered to take action against those they suspect of being un-

documented, LULAC representatives said.

SB 17 went into effect on Jan. 1, 2024, and has immediately impacted the resources available to students through the dissolution of ODEI. SB 4, depending on many legal challenges, will go into effect on March 5, 2024, and it will classify crossing the Mexi-

co-Texas border outside of designated ports of entry as a misdemeanor and allow Texas law enforcement rather than federal immigration agents to enforce this law. Reuters said the U.S. Justice Department sees this action as unconstitutional and civil rights groups such as the ACLU and the Immigration Forum said they see it as a severe infringe-

ment on civil rights. The Mexican government and the U.S. attorney general oppose the bill – the attorney general and the city of Houston are suing the state over it. The bill requires that state judges deport migrants if convicted while allowing charges to be dropped if the migrant returns to Mexico of their own volition.

Amongst scrapped ODEI events include The Multicultural Center Gala was previously held on April 28, 2023, as an event specifically dedicated to celebrating the diverse communities at UTD — including Pride, LULAC and the ASU.

SEE **IMMIGRATION**, PAGE 5



ANIKA SULTANA | MERCURY STAFF

ODEI removed: trans students react

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
News Editor

Texas SB 17 is officially in effect, bringing an end to the Galerstein Gender Center and the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Trans students have been left with far fewer on campus resources; some now turn to student organizations like Pride for support.

As part of UTD's adherence to the state law, identity-based workshops and Diversity Dialogues once hosted by the GGC will no longer be offered, Raul Hinojosa, assistant vice president of OCRS said. Before Jan. 1, UTD's trans community closely collaborated with the former Gender Center and ODEI

to organize community events, including the annual Trans Day of Remembrance. What the Office of Campus Resources and Support will continue to

“UTD was the first place I felt like I was fully safe to express myself gender wise.”

— Danny Laboda

support and host is still under question as campus administrators attempt to follow the law outlined in SB 17.

Yvette Pearson, vice president for Office of Campus Resources and Support and former vice president for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion will lead the new office with an emphasis on supporting faculty and students from diverse backgrounds.

“It is a critical component of the university's efforts to be a place where members of the community from all backgrounds are welcomed,” Pearson said.

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TIPA
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The Mercury is a proud member of both the Associated Collegiate Press and the Texas Intercollegiate Press Association.

UTDPD Blotter

- December 2**
 - An individual was charged with the offense of Accident-Duty to Give Info and Render Aid in violation of motor laws.
- December 5**
 - A theft occurred sometime between Nov. 15 to Dec. 5 and is still under investigation.
- December 9**
 - Computer science junior Nathan Perez was charged on a count of Assault-Continuous Violence Against Family due to physical violence against his romantic partner. The offense was cleared by arrest, and Perez was released from jail in December.
- December 23**
 - An individual was cleared by arrest for possession of a controlled substance and criminal trespass.
- January 1**
 - A minor was charged with illegal possession of tobacco products.



LEGEND

VEHICULAR INCIDENT

THEFT

DRUGS & ALCOHOL

OTHER

MAP: UTD | COURTESY

From The Mercury Archives: January 15, 1990

Celebrate Freedom

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

By Reginald Boudreaux

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was an American by chance rather than by choice. Dr. King became a great American by choosing to make the principles that have made America great his personal creed and code of ethics. Dr. King lived and died for his belief that all men are equal but no man is greater than another.

The American Heritage Dictionary defines "great" as being remarkable, outstanding, or distinguished. It is certainly remarkable that the son of a Baptist minister from Atlanta could go on from a career in the ministry to become the only black Nobel Prize winner that America has ever produced. It is remarkable that Dr. King was able to withstand beatings, threats against his life and the lives of his family, vicious verbal abuse and numerous arrests while never giving up the vision of a nation united by respect and love between men of all colors.

Dr. King was outstanding because he chose to put the good

of many over his personal safety. In 1963, Dr. King organized the march on Washington, D.C. This was a march that brought over 200,000 people from all races and all walks of life together to demand justice for all men. Who but an outstanding man could combine the hopes and dreams of many into one dream of peace and freedom from persecution?

Dr. King was outstanding because he had the courage to try and change those things in America that cast a dark shadow on the image of a beautiful nation...racial injustice, unethical wars against foreign nations, the plight of the poor, and inequality of women.

Dr. King distinguished himself by letting peaceful resistance by the way that he chose to obtain his goals. As other black and white leaders called for the shedding of blood, Dr. King prayed that love and compassion would dictate the actions of men.

Dr. King left behind a legacy rich in lessons about patience and tolerance and pride in being of color. His legacy speaks of en-

durance and hope and prayer. His legacy continually reminds us that we are all brothers and sisters, and the colors of our skins do not alter this. In a time when black males were still called "boy," Dr. King carried himself as a "man" and he showed America and the world that black men deserve respect as do white men or men of any race.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was born on Jan. 15, 1929 in Atlanta. On April 3, 1968, he had gone to Memphis to help organize a strike of the city's predominantly black sanitation workers. There he died from a gunshot wound on April 4. The dedicated efforts of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., have amended the Constitution of the United States of America. The amendments are called the "Civil Rights Laws," and they affect each and every American citizen and foreign visitor in our great country today. Fifteen years later, on Nov. 3, 1983, a law was enacted declaring Jan. 15 as a national holiday.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.,

was a remarkable person. He was an outstanding leader. He was a distinguished scholar, and he will always be remembered as a "Great American." At the very least, the most blatant aspects of that social disease known as racism. They struggled so that all Americans would have the right to vote, the right to equal treatment under the law, and the right to public accommodation.

But today is a new day and we are a new generation. Among the challenges that we face today is to ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to share in the richness that is America.

In order to keep Dr. King's dream alive, America must work to provide educational and economic opportunities to all her people. If we are to continue to have a strong national defense then we must go on the offense in the field of education. If we wish to remain an international power economically then we must work toward economic parity at home.

In the words of Dr. MLK Jr., it is time to "learn baby learn, so you can earn baby earn!"



Hundreds of activists congregated at Love Field Airport to condemn Biden's arrival to Dallas and his proposed military support package to Israel. Protestors shouted "ceasefire now!" in reference to the war in Gaza.



Demonstrators are released from Lew Sterrett Justice Center; police officers observe in the background. Dozens of other demonstrators stayed in the center overnight to support detainees.



Former SJP president embraces her family after being released from Lew Sterrett Justice Center.



The former SJP president is detained by Dallas PD while blocking an airport road protesting Biden.

COMETS DETAINED AT 'GENOCIDE JOE' PROTEST

Students protested Joe Biden’s arrival and called for a ceasefire in Gaza while obstructing a major entrance of Love Field Airport. Detainees included a former UTD SJP President.

FATIMAH AZEEM
Editor-in-Chief

UTD students and alumni were among a dozen protesters detained on Jan. 8 after demanding a ceasefire in Gaza and shutting down a main entrance to Love Field Airport as Biden landed in Dallas.

According to a press release from the Palestinian Youth Movement, Dallas police detained 13 protesters during a sit-in that blocked Biden's intended route of travel to Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson's funeral. A video circulating on social media shows police detaining multiple alumni, including former SJP president Nidaa Lafi. While being led into a police vehicle, she and hundreds of surrounding protesters shouted "ceasefire now" referencing the Israeli military's siege on Gaza. Multiple protesters said they witnessed Biden's vehicle taking an alternate route through the highway later that evening, likely because of the rally. Nour Saad, secretary for SJP, said that is the first shutdown the Dallas pro-Palestine community organized, following a string of shutdowns in major cities across the nation.

"I do have a message for Biden," Saad said. "[He] underestimates the resilience of the Palestinian people. It's been 75 years and 95 days, and we don't forgive, we don't forget. We'll not have business as usual until justice is served."

A Dallas police spokesman, Michael Dennis, said the group of protesters blocked an intersection of Mockingbird Lane and Herb Kelleher Way – a main entrance to the airport – shortly before 6:30 p.m. Authorities gave protesters three warnings to leave the area before they started making arrests. Dennis said the detainees originally faced charges for obstruction of a highway; however, they were released without charge after being held overnight.

PYM said those detained included a former intern of the late Bernice Johnson who *The Mercury* was unable to contact. AHT sophomore Luka Zhou was also detained.

Lew Sterrett Justice Center held protesters until their release on Jan. 9 at 5 a.m. as documented in a live broadcast from protester Alia Taha. Taha was one of the dozens of demonstrators from Love Field Airport who stayed overnight in the detention center as a part of a sit-in to show support for the detainees.

A statement from a recent SJP post referred to Biden as "Genocide Joe" and explained that PYM and SJP organized the rally for the Dallas community to unite and demand a ceasefire in Gaza while Biden was in town. The war in Gaza has killed more than 22,000 Palestinians, including more than 7,000 children, primarily from Israeli airstrikes and ground attacks, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. The United Nations Relief Agency for Palestinians and the UN World Food Program warned that half of Gazans – about 1 million people – are at risk of starvation, and 85% of the population is displaced. Israel is facing a genocide charge from South Africa in the International Court of Justice, the UN's highest legal body, for its military response—a charge under dispute in The Hague at the time of publication.

"[Biden] is NOT welcome here while Palestinians face a genocide that is fully funded and fully supported by the United States," the SJP post said.

According to Axios, Biden requested an additional \$14.3 billion in military aid to Israel as of October 2023. In November 2023, as a part of a larger spending bill, the House of Representatives approved \$14.3 billion in military aid to Israel. This would be the most military aid the U.S. has ever pledged to Israel — if the bill passes through all chambers. The U.S. has provided more aid to Israel than any other foreign country since World War II, sitting at above \$300 billion, with Vietnam in second place with a little over \$185 billion. U.S. officials said the \$14.3 billion military aid package would include money for better air and missile defense systems including the Iron Dome.

UTA Progressive Student Union and National Alliance DFW called for the public to contact Lew Sterrett Justice Center to demand the release of the detainees shortly after their arrests. The lines were busy when *The Mercury* attempted to call the detention center at midnight. The Dallas Alliance Against Racist and Political Repression offered to assist with bail funds but it wasn't necessary since the detainees were released without charge.

The original demonstration began at 3 p.m. on Jan. 8, with hundreds of protesters outside the airport chanting slogans like "Genocide Joe has got to go" and calling for a ceasefire. Victor Faner, a UTD alumnus and advocate for Palestinian human rights, arrived at 7 p.m., after police had already dispersed the crowd. Faner described protesters as energetic when he arrived, perhaps even more impassioned with their chanting than before the arrests, but the crowd had dwindled down to 70 or so people and moved to the sidewalk since 3 p.m. Despite this, police presence continued to roll in with at least 10 officers mounted on horses and 30 to 40 officers in total as seen in a photo Faner provided.

"The protesters themselves were peaceful," Faner said. "No one was doing any rioting of any sort. We were loud, and we wanted to have our voices heard but we weren't violent in any way. So, I did feel tension seeing the sheer number of police officers there. This small group of maybe 70 protesters was facing down a group of 40 or so officers — it was a level of intimidation, and it didn't seem right or proportional to what was going on."

“ I do have a message for Biden. [He] underestimates the resilience of the Palestinian people ... We'll not have business until justice is served. ”
— Nour Saad
Secretary of SJP

Faner said he supports humanitarian aid and advocacy initiatives, including donating to bail funds for protesters and charities such as the Palestine Children's Relief Fund — one of the largest non-governmental non-profit organizations delivering medical aid to Palestine. He started attending rallies for Palestine in October with his girlfriend who is also a UTD alum.

"On a personal level, it does give me hope to go to these protests and see that I'm not crazy — see that there are other people who are experiencing and feeling and seeing the same things the same way I am and are trying their best to do something about it with what little power we have," Faner said. "The only thing you can do with so little power on an individual level is to come together — show people, show the city, show the police, show your local officials the truth."



Love Field protestor is escorted into a police vehicle for transportation to the detention center. They were released the following morning.




Activist holds a sign that says "Genocide brought to you by US tax \$\$"



The 13 protestors take a photo together after being released from jail.

NEW YEAR, NEW GAINZ

TIME TO GET SOME SERIOUS GAINZ!



HAPPY NEW YEAR

JAN 2024

Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

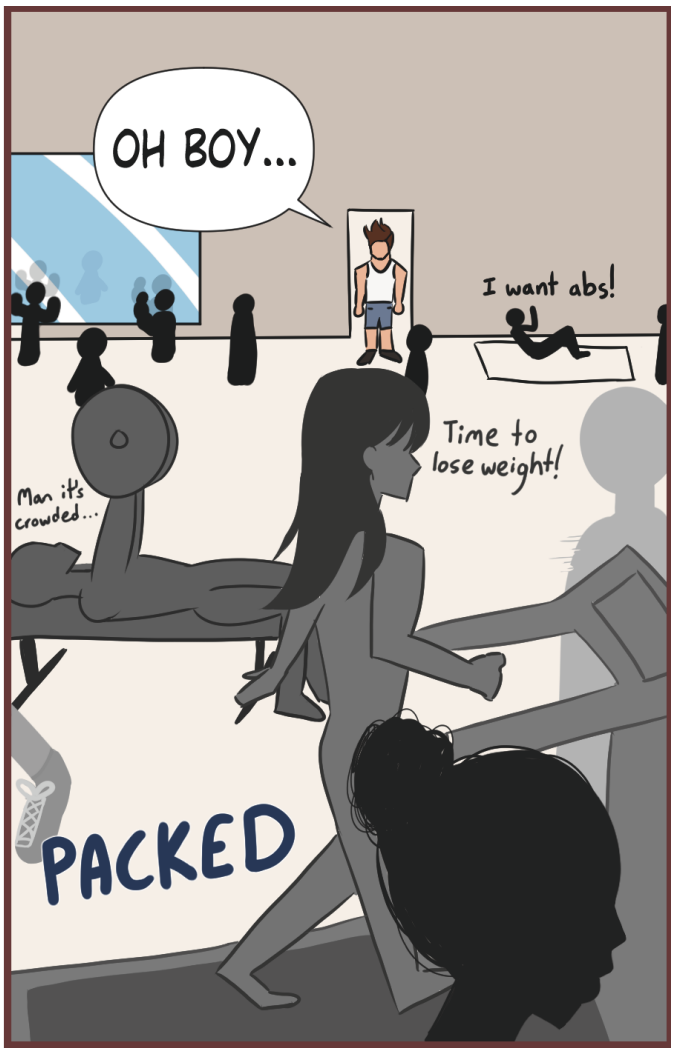
OH BOY...

Man it's crowded...

I want abs!

Time to lose weight!

PACKED



RACHEL WOON | MERCURY STAFF

FALSE HOPE

* Finally gets the motivation to draw *





[art montage with bg music]



what happened...

ANN JAYAN | MERCURY STAFF

12.04 Sudoku key

7	2	6	9	3	5	1	4	8
3	4	8	6	1	2	9	7	5
5	1	9	4	7	8	6	3	2
4	6	7	1	8	9	2	5	3
9	5	2	3	6	7	4	8	1
1	8	3	5	2	4	7	9	6
8	7	5	2	9	6	3	1	4
6	3	4	7	5	1	8	2	9
2	9	1	8	4	3	5	6	7

Circle Back key

1	C	O	M	P	A	C	T	S	15	D	C	A	R	E	A
16	H	E	A	D	B	U	T	T	17	A	R	S	O	N	S
18	G	R	A	F	S	P	E	E	19	R	E	S	I	N	K
20									21	O	I	S	E		
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25	A	B	A	C	U	S			N	O	U	G	A	T	S
26	N	I	G	H	T				A	U	T	O	P	I	L
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1.16 Sudoku

6				5		3	9	4	
							3		
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2		6				7	8		4
				3		6			2
				9					
1					9		4		
3		5	4		8				
								8	

Piles Up

mini crossword

1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				

Across

1 Escargot

6 Like the Vikings

7 ___ mind (in agreement)

8 Escaped injury

9 Crockpot concoctions

Down

1 Comes down in flakes

2 Jack Sprat's dietary restriction

3 Came up

4 "The time ___, old man!"

5 Onion-like vegetables

ALANA PLATT | MERCURY STAFF

Eddie Bernice Johnson passes

A lawmaker and activist with 40 years of service, Johnson contributed to UTD's early growth by helping to change admission practices

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
News Editor

Eddie Bernice Johnson died Dec. 31, 2023 at the age of 89 after 40 years of serving as a politician at both the state and federal levels. Because of Johnson's efforts in the Texas Senate, UTD began admitting underclassmen in the 90s.

Johnson began her political life as a civil rights activist in the 1960s, and she went on to work as a nurse and later as a public servant. Johnson served an important role in the development of UTD, the growth of Dallas, national education and scientific policy. Among her many accolades, Johnson was the first black woman elected to public office in Dallas County. She served as the Chair of the House Science Committee from 2019 to 2023 and she played a pivotal role in developing UTD into the institution it is today.

Beginning as a graduate research institute with the intent of providing Texas Instruments (TI) with newly educated staff, UTD would eventually join the UT System with strict supervision from the state. Juniors and seniors could not enroll until 1975. The state would further expand UTD's ability to admit students in 1989 with the passage of HB 42 during the first session of the 71st legislature of Texas.

HB 42 allowed for the enrollment of 5,000 freshmen and sophomores combined, as well as a 4% increase in enrollment each year. It also reserved certain sections of student body enrollment for minorities.

"It is the intent of the legislature that minority students be full participants in the educational opportunities created by the admission of lower-division undergraduate students to the University of Texas at Dallas," the bill said.

HB 42 was written and originally introduced into the Texas House of Representatives by David Cain. After



UTD | COURTESY
The signing of HB 42 in 1989. Front from left to right: Peter O'Donnell, Senator Orland Harold Harris, Senator Eddie Bernice Johnson, Governor Bill Clements, First Lady Rita Clements and Representative Fred Hill. From left to right in back: UT System Chancellor Hans Mark, Louis Beecherl, Jr. and VP of Academic Affairs Alexander Clark.

passing in the house, Johnson and co-sponsor Chet Edwards presented the bill in the state senate, where it gained enough votes to pass into law. HB 42 went into effect in October of 1989, and UTD's first freshman class was ad-

mitted in 1990.

As a politician, Johnson also worked to provide increased funding to Texas universities and public transportation services. In 2019, DART renamed Union Station to Eddie Bernice John-

son Union Station due in large part to her work to provide the agency with approximately \$1 billion in funding for the development of the green, red-and blue lines.

Johnson's 10 years in state office and

30 consecutive years in federal office have left an influential impression on North Texas with the funding of public transit, the expansion of higher education at UTD and the push for civil rights.

GENDER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

In their Dec. 5, 2023 presentation to student government, Raul Hinojosa said that programs such as the Life Transitions Closet and the lounges, study areas and other facility resources may continue to be available upon approval by the UT system. UTD continues to allow students and faculty the ability to update their legal names and preferred names through the Atlas service portal.

"UTD was the first place I felt like it was fully safe to express myself gender wise," alumnus Danny Laboda said.

From 2020 to 2022 UTD was ranked as one of the best colleges for LGBTQ+ students in the entire U.S. according to the Campus Pride Index's Best of the Best rankings. UTD, along with all other Texas and Florida schools, failed to make the 2023 ranking due to what the Campus Pride Index describes as laws "that effectively ban LGBTQ+ inclusive policies, programs and practices" at colleges.

Other advocacy groups have denounced the over 40 anti-trans bills introduced in Texas, including Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. PFLAG recently sued Gov. Greg Abbott after the pas-

sage of a law that would classify transitioning as child abuse. Data collected by the Trevor Project indicates that when trans individuals are provided with affirmation and support, the chances they attempt suicide, which are roughly 1 out of every 5 trans individuals, decrease by approximately 43%. ECS student Andromeda said these laws make her feel UTD is not a welcoming environment for trans students. Andromeda asked to stay anonymous because she fears the family members she lives with will be hostile towards her trans identity.

"What do all these people pedaling transphobia have to gain? It is one of the great cruelties of American society, that cruelty shown to those who some deem degenerate, those who some deem weak, and those who some deem dangerous gets thunderous applause," Andromeda said.

UTD's trans community has faced both acceptance and rejection as reported by interviewed trans students. Trans student Laboda was able to interact regularly with the resources provided by the gender center for an overall beneficial experience.

"My friends all knew my pronouns up front, and nobody who knew me ever messed them up," Laboda said. "Even those who didn't know me defaulted to they/them pronouns because I suppose I

didn't seem cis? I was never given any grief for being queer. I don't know if many of my professors knew I wasn't cis! They all called me [by] my name no problem."

Former treasurer of Pride Cassandra

“It is a critical component of the university’s efforts to be a place where members of the community from all backgrounds are welcomed.”

— Yvette Pearson
Vice President of OCRS

Millicent Palmer said the organization helped her connect with others and form close bonds with officers; she also began transitioning while at UTD and found the process to be easy and accessible. Since

graduating, Palmer has moved to New Mexico.

In the past, trans students have struggled to access campus resources like the Testing Center. Computer science junior Rainier Pederson said that there have been times they did not know whether they had registered for an exam, since the course uses their preferred name while [the Testing Center] uses their legal name.

"[The Testing Center] feels the need to exclusively use my legal name, even when that makes things harder for everyone involved in the process," Pederson said.

The American Psychological Association President Frank Worrell said he suspects that Abbott continues to attack the trans community as a way to garner political support, and that the physical and mental risk to trans people in the state may grow.

"Every day I see a new transphobic bill slither its way into a geriatric state congress full of bloodthirsty bureaucrats," Andromeda said. "Every day I see new arguments on why trans women aren't women. And every day I see more and more people, whether they be recent immigrants or the goddamn richest man in the world fall for this mass hysteria. There are so many people, good people, people I love, that are far deep in the transphobic rabbit hole."

OCRS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

support each other."

Vice President of UTD ASU Omolere Aliu said that the dismantling of ODEI might change the types of relationships the organization has with advisors and staff members.

"It does bring worry about how our administration will be treating us as a social organization and an organization of marginal identity," Aliu said.

ODEI was an important resource that provided ASU with the means for planning socials, outreach coordination and expanding their impact on campus.

"Resources we've been given have included words of advice, words of encouragement and their presence," Ololo said. "They also usually share their resources with us and help us communicate with other staff of color."

Ololo said he wants ASU to continue to maintain a strong presence as an organization.

"We're still here to educate people, to promote our community no matter what," Ololo said. "We refuse to forget who we are and assimilate, we refuse to let go of our culture."



MEADOW PENA | COURTESY
UTD Democrats President Meadow Pena (left) and Isabella Spartz (right) talk with former House Representative Beto O'Rourke, who has spoken out against SB 4.

IMMIGRATION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"I remember going to a multicultural center event last spring with LULAC, and I loved it," UTD Democrats president Meadow Pena said. "It was a banquet for all of us that are minorities on the campus. But things like the banquet cost money. It's scary to think that that may have been the last event like that to bring all of the different organizations for the minorities on campus together."

The national branch of LULAC officially denounced SB 4 on Nov. 15, 2023, shortly after it had been passed by both houses of the legislature — the governor signed it into law in December. LULAC said the law was an attack on the Latino community since it "criminalizes the act of crossing the border without proper documentation" while simultaneously empowering Texas police to arrest immigrants while "blatantly sidestepping established federal immigration protocols." Felony charges could be applied to those charged by Texas police for multiple violations of this law.

"When I'm in the car with my mom, I'm scared, even though I was born a citizen here," Pena said. "I'm scared for my family because we could just get pulled over because of the color of our skin, because we look Latino. Even though we're citizens, it is like we now have to constantly prove it."

Students who are suspected of being in the country illegally or of having crossed the border outside of designated ports could be given jail time of up to six months in jail for the first offense, with increasing punishments for repeated charges including 20 years in prison and even deportation. UTD students in prison or deported from the country would face extreme obstacles toward completing their degree plans as UTDSP5003 section A subsection 1.2 would consider either instance a violation of the student code of conduct which would result in disciplinary proceedings under the dean of students.

"Students are paying tuition to be at this university, and anything could happen that would force them to leave; stripping them of all their education and money spent on tuition," Pena said. "It could all be gone because they were pulled over and the officer assumed they weren't here legally based on the color of their skin."

The Justice Department is currently suing the state of Texas after Associate Attorney General of the U.S. Vanita Gupta said that SB4 is "clearly unconstitutional." However, if the law is not declared unconstitutional then it will go into effect as planned. Pena emphasizes that SB 4 makes the major investment of attending university and working towards paying tuition something Latino students will have to constantly worry about when it could be removed from them the deportation of

their loved ones and possibly even themselves. UTD Democrats and UTD LULAC are among the student organizations that oppose SB 4.

"I think this is going to create a lot more animosity towards law enforcement," vice president of UTD Democrats Isabella Spartz said. "[SB4] just doesn't create a better or safer environment for anyone."

The non-profit immigrant advocacy group National Immigration Forum (NIF) expressed similar sentiment regarding the increased sense of resentment and fear which SB 4 would cause to fester between law enforcement and immigrant communities. The NIF said that "SB 4 bars any local policy that would prohibit police officers from questioning a person's immigration status, even during routine detentions such as traffic stops." Spartz fears that this will cause a cascade of uncertainty and fear that will heavily impact vulnerable groups on campus beyond just the large on campus immigrant community.

"I know that this is bad, and it is going to have ripple effects on all communities, especially for women," Spartz said. "Women are the victims of sexual assault at higher rates, and this kind of legislation makes it so that a lot of women won't be able to go to the police if they are being harassed because the huge fear of being deported overshadows this."

New Year's resolutions: Do they work?

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

“New year, new me” usually comes along with the dozens of resolutions people set for themselves in January. But how many of these resolutions do they keep up with, and are they empty promises for change?

The Mercury conducted a poll and found that 25 students out of the 31 respondents stated that they do have resolutions for 2024. The most popular resolutions for students are academic and health-related. In the poll, 93% of respondents selected that they create resolutions related to health, such as losing weight, gaining muscle or being more active. Sixty three percent of poll respondents selected resolutions related to academics, such as getting better grades or landing an internship.

Forty one percent of poll respondents selected resolutions related to financial security, and 26% of poll respondents selected material wealth, such as getting a car or nice clothes, as a resolution. Lastly, 26% of respondents chose the option of ‘other’ if their resolutions did not fall under the previous categories.

Coordinator of Recreational Sports Zachary Jones, said he notices an influx of students at the gym at the beginning of each year, but by February or March, many fall off.

“We do our best to create an open and inviting environment so any new patrons can feel comfortable and welcome in the Rec center and wish to keep coming back,” Jones said.

Academic success coach and child learning and development junior Tiffany Taylor said that students often contact success coaches at the beginning of a new semester to work on their goals.

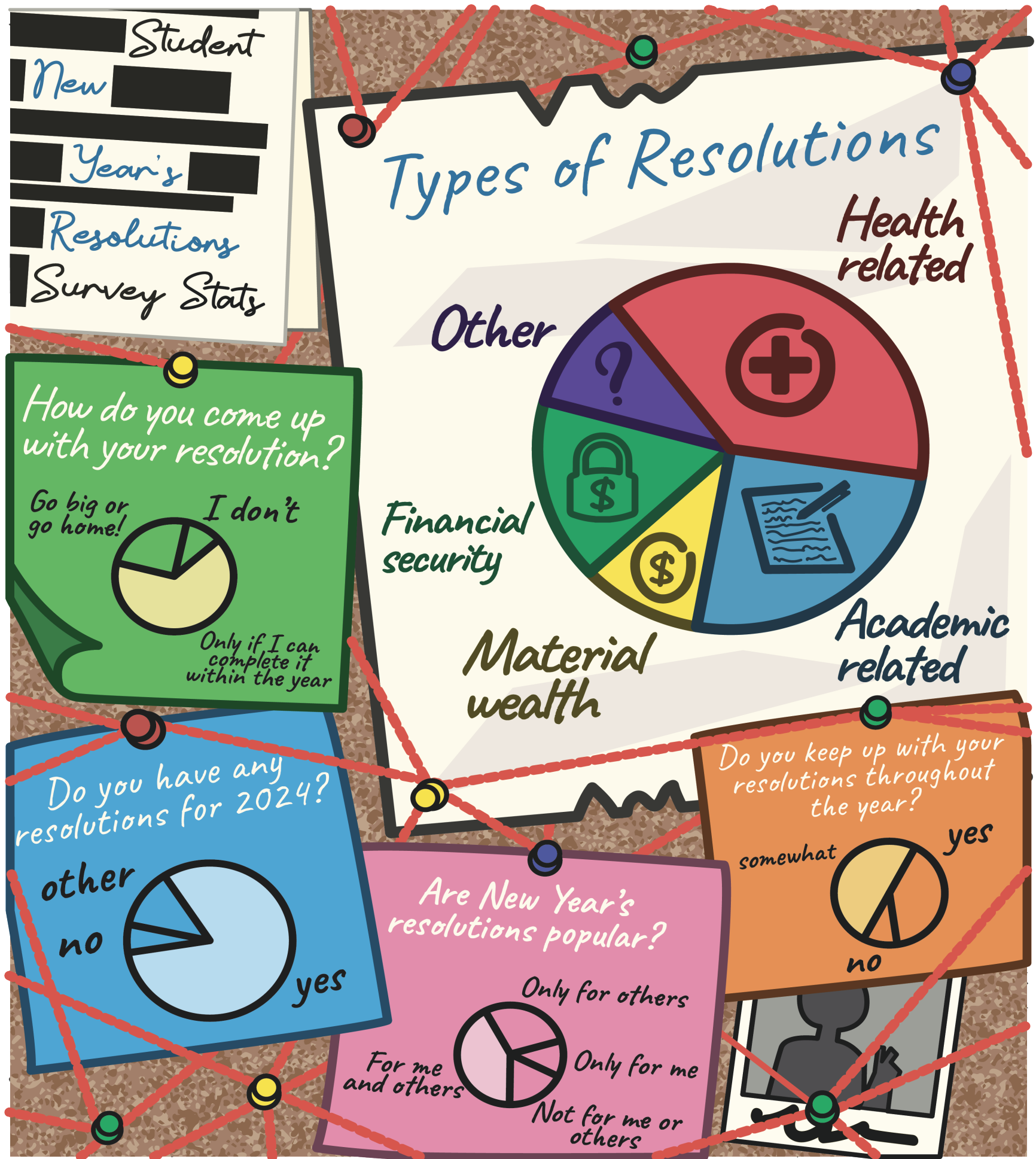
“One thing we really work on with academic success coaching is setting smart goals,” Taylor said. “You want something that’s pushing you a little bit out of your comfort zone so you can reach a little bit farther, but you want to make sure that it’s something you can reasonably achieve, so you’re not just letting yourself down.”

Another academic success coach and AHT junior Chinwe Offoboche, said that many students wanting to better themselves academically usually do not have a clear goal in mind.

“I’ll have students who know that they’re not doing well in the class, but they can’t really figure out why, especially if they’re a student that normally does really well,” Offoboche said.

Since 63% of students wished for academic success in the new year, which included landing an internship, career consultant Jennifer Lynch said that students should use their resumes as their number one marketing tool.

“The main advice is to start now,” Lynch said. “The consultants at the University Career Center can assist stu-



ERIN GUTSCHKE | MERCURY STAFF

dents with their goal of obtaining an internship by helping them with search strategies, resume reviews, interview preparation, crafting their personal pitch and preparing for career fairs.”

Nineteen out of the 31 poll respondents responded that they make resolutions only if they can easily be completed. Furthermore, 12 respondents said they keep up with their resolutions throughout the year, while 15 said they

somewhat keep up with them. Jones says that with many health-related goals, students are bound to hit a plateau or have some setbacks. However, he assures students that that is normal.

“Simply creating the habit of ‘I am going to be active every week at this specific time’ will help create consistency, and many health-related goals require consistency at the minimum to see success,” Jones said.

Offoboche said that he’s noticed students not following up with resolutions.

“And I think the number one reason is not using self-reflection skills,” Offoboche said. “If you’re making the same resolution every single year, and you’re always failing, maybe it’s time to change the way you approach that resolution.”

Resolutions are a way for people to

bring about change to their lives and a fresh start to their year. However, it is important to stick to realistic goals that allow students to still enjoy themselves and not feel tied down.

“The best piece of advice I can give for goal setting is balance — finding that time to eat, sleep and have fun, that is the foundation for a successful academic career and a happy college experience,” Taylor said.

NEW YEAR, NEW 'MEAN GIRLS'



GRACE COWGER | MERCURY STAFF

KARLEY BOLENBAUGH
Mercury Staff

“Mean Girls” (2024) hits theaters 20 years after the original, bringing a revamped and modern look at one of the biggest pop culture sensations of the 2000s.

The new film is an adaptation of the Broadway musical, adapted from the 2004 original comedy of the same name. “Mean Girls” (2024) released on Jan. 12, starring Angourie Rice, Renee Rapp and Auli’I Cravalho. The movie brings Broadway to the big screen by infusing songs from the musical, while providing a modern update to the original with its wardrobe, cultural references and new faces. In the 2024 adaptation, Regina’s popularity isn’t limited to Northshore High but broadcast to an online following. The use of social media would be a great way to enhance the movie, but in an effort to showcase the expedited speed of online rumor mills, the pacing of the movie ultimately feels a bit too fast. Overall, the movie feels like it could have benefited from a few additional minutes of runtime. Iconic moments from the original, such as the documentation of Regina’s downfall and Cady’s rise to plastic status end up feeling

SEE **MEAN GIRLS**, PAGE 7



TOHO CO., LTD. | COURTESY PHOTO

‘Godzilla Minus One’ roars back with emotional depth

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

Godzilla returns to the big screen in a massive display of raw power in “Godzilla Minus One.” But Godzilla’s newest film is not just about the destructive monster — it is a sentimental story about war, love and humanity’s ability to work together.

“Godzilla Minus One” is an improvement on the action sci-fi genre, going beyond the typical monster movie narrative with an emotional storyline and dynamic, lovable characters. Rated 98% on Rotten Tomatoes, the film offers a poignant exploration of broader themes that resonate with both fans and those seeking a deeper cinematic experience.

The film takes place in Japan post World War II, when the country is at its lowest during reconstruction, when it is suddenly struck by a new crisis: a gigantic reptile monster. “Godzilla Minus One” opens with kamikaze pilot Koichi Shikishima (Ryunosuke Kamiki) landing

his plane on Odo Island, lying about a mechanical malfunction with his plane to escape sacrificing himself.

Previous Godzilla films were action-based with little to no plot or character development, which stifles a movie’s ability to be great or memorable and makes it repetitive and predictable. They lacked the element of surprise and skillful writing that “Godzilla Minus One” was able to successfully portray in a monster film. Koichi’s inner turmoil sets the story apart from other Godzilla movies. Yes, there is action and yes, we get the iconic scenes of Godzilla destroying everything in its path. But the great acting and exceptional story brings the movie to the next level.

Another aspect of the movie that separates it from the rest is its character growth, which makes the characters lovable despite their flaws. The sole survivor of a Godzilla attack and lead mechanic,

SEE **GODZILLA**, PAGE 7

‘The Iron Claw’ rips hearts apart

The tragedy and triumphs of wrestling legends, the Von Erichs, comes to the big screen in a display of '80s nostalgia and brutality



A24 | COURTESY PHOTO

MIA NGUYEN
Life & Arts Editor

Children and their families would plop down in front of their television in the '80s to watch the Von Erich brothers wrestle in an extravagant display of rippling muscle and showmanship. Decades later, families can go to the theater to relive their childhoods while watching the tragedy of the Von Erich Curse unfold before them.

Named after the famous wrestling move, “The Iron Claw” follows the Von Erich family, a group of brothers known for pioneering professional wrestling in Texas with skill and charisma. The storyline focuses on Kevin, Terry, David and Mike as they attempt to find success in the professional wrestling world while keeping their brotherhood and personal lives intact. While sprinkled with dramatic reenactments of the brothers’ wrestling matches, the film focuses on their tragic and unconventional family dynamic.

The brothers were inseparable, only kept together by the hard love that their domineering father bestowed on them. The star-studded cast consisting of Zac Efron, Jeremy Allen White, Harris Dickinson and Stanley Simons was incredible, oozing the warmth and energy that comes with siblings while also showing the individuality in each brother. Efron portrayed the eldest, Kevin, with a sense of caring and overprotectiveness that heavily contrasts with the brutality of the sport. White took on Kerry’s despondency and ambition that made audiences root for him. Simons, a lesser-known actor, drew out the sensitivity and youth of Mike, the youngest brother who didn’t want a life in the ring.

While each cast member was fantastic,



A24 | COURTESY PHOTO

the standout star of the film was Harris Dickinson, who captured David’s teasing nature and confidence in the spotlight. Every scene of his felt larger than life, throwing audiences into the ring and making audiences feel a deep kinship with David.

The cinematography focused on juxtaposing the flashy '80s colored wrestling ring and skimpy wrestling garments with

the bleakness of brown foliage and white-picket imagery of North Texas. This contrast reflects the mental highs and lows of the brothers and lets older audiences bask in the nostalgia of vintage Dallas while exposing young viewers to an aesthetic not previously experienced.

Even physically, the actors underwent a drastic transformation to prepare for the ring, packed with muscle and suited up

in wrestling gear. The actors’ appearances emphasized the physical strain that their careers had on their bodies, but the real damage was psychological. With a family legacy and curse looming over them, the brothers are hit with tragedy after tragedy. There was the capability for their story to seem unrealistic and Shakespearean, but the script showed the domino effect that the sport had on them all.

Unfortunately, at times, the family felt as artificial as the sport they played. With inconsistent Texas accents and vague connections that only make sense if you are aware of wrestling history, the Von Erichs didn’t feel lived in. Maybe it was the stress of wrestling seeping into their personal lives, or the runtime didn’t allow every characters’ motivation to be fully fleshed out, but at times it was hard to see the group as a real family and not a cast of actors with good chemistry.

The death scenes of Kerry and Mike were tear-inducing, but Lily James’ portrayal of Pam — Kevin’s wife — was underrated and heartbreaking. Marrying into a family marred by death and mental illness is hard enough, but Kevin’s fear of the curse resulted in his absence as he distanced himself from his wife and kids. James showed the exhaustion and strength needed to raise a family and work a full-time job, coupled with the empathy and love she expresses for the Von Erichs. She is filled with exuberance and femininity, making her a standout in a film centered around masculinity and pain.

Filled with recreations of real advertisements and wrestling matches, the film pushed the feeling of '80s nostalgia combined with emotional characterizations of beloved pop culture figures to make audience members deeply invested. Even if you aren’t an '80s baby or well-versed in the history of wrestling, this film will make you feel like a fan of decades past, crying over the loss of your favorite Von Erich brother. So bring your family and definitely bring your tissues to experience the agony of “The Iron Claw.”



TOHO CO., LTD. | COURTESY PHOTO

GODZILLA
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

Sosaku Tachibana (Munetaka Aoki), despises Koichi for his cowardness and lack of self-sacrifice. But toward the end of the movie, when these two characters meet again, Koichi finds the courage to fight off the reptile monster, and Tachibana learns to forgive Koichi. Koichi not only finds the courage to defeat Godzilla, but he also learns to love. He steps up to be an adoptive father to orphan Akiko (Sae Nagatani) and confesses his love to Nor-

iko Oishi (Minami Hamabe) after she is almost killed by the reptilian monster.

“Godzilla Minus One” is entirely in Japanese with subtitles in English, so the viewer is reading the movie as much as they are watching it. However, if subtitles aren’t an issue for you, be prepared for an entertaining 125 minutes of monster action and emotional storylines.

This monstrous film will leave you in tears, magnifying the beauty of humanity during catastrophe with the bonus of a legendary monster.

MEAN GIRLS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 6

insignificant due to the pace.

The modern look at “Mean Girls” isn’t all bad, however. The updated comedy was probably the biggest surprise of the night. Unlike other films, which create a cringeworthy parody of Gen Z, “Mean Girls” (2024) will actually get young viewers to laugh.

However, the movie works best when it focuses on its core: a musical. The movie breaks out of its plastic shell whenever a musical number comes on. Several Broadway songs were cut from the film, but the remaining ones are treated with care. “What Ifs” replaces “It Roars” as the first solo in the movie, and even though I believe the original song would have been the better choice, Rice executes the new song perfectly.

While I originally didn’t mind Gretchen and Karen’s verses in “Meet The Plastics” being cut, after seeing the rest of the movie, I wished we got to see more of Bebe Wood and Avan-

tika. Woods’s performance of “What’s Wrong With Me?” was visually simple but oozed with emotion and heart and Avantika’s performance of “Sexy” had me laughing and dancing in my seat; both truly embodied the spirit of their characters.

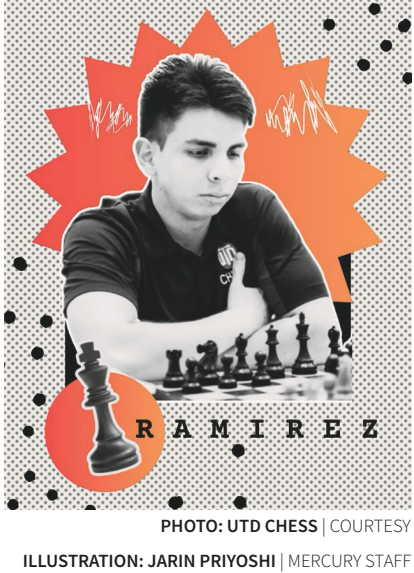
“Someone Gets Hurt” and “World Burn” were two of the strongest performances in the movie, mixing incredible choreography, eye-grabbing visuals and Rapp’s incredible vocal — which captures the same fiery spirit of the Regina George we see in the original. Rapp, who also played Regina on Broadway, did an amazing job portraying the untouchable quality that the mean “it” girl is known for. She brought new life into the character, her performance being the highlight of the movie.

Janis, played by Cravalho, and Damian, played by Jaquel Spivey, also bring new life to their classic characters. The character of Janis holds the same heart as the original, but with a change in her backstory to provide a new look at a character we are used to. Spivey delivers an equivalent per-

formance as Damian, eliciting more laughs from me than the rest of the characters combined. The duo’s performance in “Revenge Party” was the perfect montage song to push the movie along. It was loud, it was bright and it truly felt like getting sucked into a raging party. Even though I was initially disappointed that Rice wouldn’t be singing Cady’s portion in “Apex Predator” like in the original musical, the choice to give it to Spivey instead only enhanced the duet.

Despite the cultural importance of the original film, “Mean Girls” (2024) shouldn’t be seen as a sequel or reboot. The musical movie isn’t going for the same early 2000s style comedy that the original has, and at its roots it is a musical. It’s a fun and engaging movie, but by marketing itself as a reboot, it forces itself into shoes far too big to fill.

While it won’t cement itself into the same iconic status that the original has, “Mean Girls” (2024) delivers an enjoyable experience that will leave you laughing and singing along throughout.



Chess player now UTD's 10th grandmaster


AAFIYA ASLAM
Mercury Staff

Information technology and management master's student Brian Ramirez Escalante became UTD's 10th grandmaster after his exceptional performance at the 2023 US Masters Open from Nov. 22-26 in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Escalante began playing chess in elementary school in Peru at a local level; he was drawn to the sport because of the logic required to delve into different positions and analyze them closely. Once he turned 11 years old, his coach recommended he play outside the city to broaden his skills. After turning 15, he became more serious about the sport as his rating rose from 1900 to 2400 in just one month. After three years of tournaments, he became an international master in 2017. After 2017, he was accepted at UTD, but didn't increase significantly in chess rating because of his studies and career goals. Finally, on Nov. 26, Escalante obtained the last of three norms to become a GM after many ups and downs in rating.

"At some point I was pretty close to the final requirement, which was to reach 2500 in rating ... I reached 2496 and then I had a streak of bad tournaments and went back down to 2460 ... It was pretty tough," Escalante said. "Finally in this tournament, I reached the rating in the last round."

The US Masters Open was an individual tournament with 114 players, meaning UTD Chess team members competed against one another and other high-level



Quesada vs. Escalante, US Masters Open (2023)

Previous moves: 26. *bxc4*, *Rd8* 27. *Nc3*

Black to move. How can Black save the game?

Answer: ... *Ne5*

Black puts his knight on e5, which will force White to take the knight to open up the position. Then, Black can take the unguarded pawn and potentially take the bishop on d2.

players. Alongside Escalante was the rest of the UTD Chess team, except junior economics Ivan Schitco and master's student Andrei Macovei, who participated in the European Teams Championship. Escalante completed his final norm thanks to round 8 of the US Masters Open, where he won against GM Yasser Perez Quesada, rated 2594.

"That game [round 8] I reached 2499 and that's how I averaged 2500 and became a GM," Escalante said.

At the start of round 8, Escalante played black and said that GM Quesada wanted to simplify the game by trading pieces. Escalante played this game by intuition, as he was worried about taking too much time in the beginning, where he could use his time in the middle of the game to think of the best moves.

"It was more like let's get the pieces out and then we will see ... I managed to equalize with black pieces, which is good, especially against someone who is higher rated," Escalante said.

After GM Quesada played knight to e2, Escalante grew worried, because if he lost this game, it would be harder for him to get the GM title.

SEE ESCALANTE, PAGE 9

BASKETBALL TEAMS HALFWAY TO CHAMPIONSHIP

The women's team is rated no. 4 in the conference, the men's no. 3 and recovering from a loss streak



Top: Junior Cierra Trigg (left) dodges a block from East Texas Baptist's Kadia Ward. The Comets have nine games remaining before the ASC championship.

ZARA JAMSHED
Mercury Staff

UTD's men's and women's basketball teams are currently mid-way through their seasons. The UTD women's basketball team is ranked at fourth place in the American Southwest Conference; they have won 11 and lost four games. The men's basketball team is in third place and has lost six and won nine games. So far, the men's team has a streak of four losses in a row but there is still ability to improve as there are 10 matches left in the 2023-2024 basketball season.

Beginning with the women's team, the first game began on Nov. 11 against University of Nebraska Wesleyan, where UTD won with a score of 63-34. The team has scored a combined total of 996 points with an average of 66.4 points. This season's highest number of points was 89 and made in a match with Southwestern University.

For the men's team, the first game began on Nov. 7 against the University of Dallas, where UTD won with a score of 75-66. The team has scored a combined total of 1102 points with an average of 78.7 points per game. This season's highest number of points was 93 and made in a match with Howard Payne University. Going forward, Cierra Trigg, a guard on the women's team, hopes that this success will continue.

"I want us to be together during the wins and losses. It's in our DNA to have the best defense in the conference, and if we're us we will be able to take on any opponent as a team and I want us to stay true to us," Trigg said.

This year, the men's team has 13 new players. One of them — Mat-

thew Soto — is a freshman, and while it's his first year playing basketball at UTD, he has been playing basketball since he was 4 years old. His dad introduced him to it, and he says he just fell in love with the sport.

"The competitive side of it...there's nothing like it...seeing all your supporters around you, for example, my family is always supporting me...it's a feeling I don't get nowhere else," Soto said.

Additionally, UTD is transitioning from a Division-III sports to Division-II. This transition coincides with the departure of some players. This will be Luke Kiser's last season since he will be graduating in the spring.

"It's my last chance to win something meaningful, especially because all of our sports teams at UTD are moving to [Division II] ... so we definitely have a sense of urgency about us, as a team, as we are trying to go into the conference championship this year," Kiser said.

The ASC championship tournament is still a month away. It is set to take place from Feb. 22-24. UTD's men's basketball team has appeared in every ASC Tournament in the past 20 years while the women's team has attended each tournament in the past 17 years.

"I really like the group we're working with this year...I think we're poised to make a good run...this year," women's team coach Joe Shotland said.

Shotland commented further on the women's team performance saying that when the team played against the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, which is ranked in the top 25 teams nationally, UTD's team was not able to surpass UMHB in the match.

"There are moments along the way



Junior Luke Kiser (left) and freshman Jordan Balderaz (right).

where you get little doses of humility and it's always about how you respond to those moments...if you're a competitor, like I know most of the team is, those moments don't break you, those moments can refocus you," Shotland said.

Shotland said that UTD's women's team is the best defensively in the entire conference. Shotland says that the team will train by watching the films of games so that key issues can be analyzed in addition to their regular routine.

The next stretch of games will be hosted at UTD, a stark contrast to the months long road trip the team has been on where games were played off-campus from Nov. 25 till Jan. 6.

"Getting through that segment was tough," Shotland said. "It's hard to be on the road and we haven't played a home game since November. So, that was successful in its own regard. I think we've done a nice job so far of gelling as a group, but we've got a lot

of basketball left ahead of us."

Basketball games for both teams will be hosted at UTD from Jan. 18 - 20 and Jan. 27 to Feb. 10.

"I'm glad to start playing back at home," Trigg said. "We finally get to play where we practice, and it just feels better not having to get on a bus to go hours away then play. It's also nice because my family doesn't live far, so they can come to the games."

For the next few weeks, there will be at least two games a week happening at UTD, and Kiser said he would love for students to attend. Shotland said students should take advantage of free admission and also encouraged them to come to home games.

"We've got a really fun product," Shotland said. "I know that our team plays in a way that fans can be proud of and that goes for both the men and the women's team."

Basketball spotlight: Donovan Souter and Trystan Clark

SOFIA MEINARDUS
Mercury Staff

As the men's and women's basketball teams approach the midpoint of their seasons, the spotlight falls on athletes senior Donovan Souter (#2) and junior Trystan Clark (#13) for their shooting and defensive prowess and team leadership on and off the court.

Both athlete's coaches have described the pair as a force that propels their teams toward success and mentors to the rest of their teammates.

Souter, a top scorer on the men's team, showed stellar performances, boasting season-highs of 31 points and 11 rebounds. In a standout game against Southwestern on Nov. 25, Souter scored 29 points, making seven three-pointers. Clark, a standout captain for the women's team, reached a season-best of 19 points and eight rebounds. In a game against Sul Ross State on Dec. 2, Clark recorded double-digit points for the sixth consecutive game. Beyond their on-court achievements, coaches said both players bring passion and determination, elevating team morale and cohesion.

"[Donovan's] gone through some ad-

versity here at UTD," men's coach Jared Fleming said. "He wasn't a freshman; he doesn't live on campus, he had to work to find a way to integrate himself into our team — that shows with him on the floor. He plays hard, no matter what the score is. That's been a big deal for our team — having our leader fight through the adversity and do the things we need him to do."

Souter's basketball journey includes two years of experience at Richland College before joining UTD in 2021, now a fifth-year senior. Hailing from Frisco, Texas, Souter plays a crucial role as a guard on the men's basketball team. He balances this commitment with his studies in business administration.

"He's really, input himself into the culture and the fabric of our team," Fleming said. "But he's an even better person, he's a fun guy, a jokester, a big character and that's a big piece of who we are."

As the sole senior on the men's basketball team, Souter has embraced the role of mentor and leader, especially in the absence of veteran help. Recognizing the team's imperative for defensive improvement, Flem-

ing emphasizes the significance of each player's contribution. In line, Souter settled into a pivotal role as the leading scorer and having his best defensive year with a 10-rebound game at St. Thomas in Houston. Souter said he aims to give his teammates energy and assurance that he always has their backs even if they have a rough game.

"I think I evolved most as a leader ... I've had to show the way for the younger players that are now coming into college ... take more of a role of being the main guy on the court," Souter said.

With a career-high of 41 field goals, Souter's leadership extends beyond the game, inspired by his mother's resilience and his uncle's help critiquing his workouts. Looking ahead, Souter remains focused on finishing the season on a high note.

"I'm going to finish my season as best as I can," Souter said. "Have a great year at UTD ... my dream is to play professional basketball."

Trystan Clark, from Burleson, Texas, is carving a path in business administration while making an impact on the women's team; recognized with the

2023 ASC All-Tournament Team award, Clark not only leads in points and free throws but also stands at the top in steals and rebounds.

"She still has untapped potential that I think that she's fighting towards every day," women's coach Joe Shotland said. "... There's still meat on the bone ... [she] has the mindset that she wants to improve ... that's huge for us."

Beyond statistics, Shotland said Clark embodies the essence of a team player, constantly putting her body on the line and getting involved in games. Shotland said Clark is an example of somebody who plays through pain and sets the tone for the team.

"Team to me is family. That's why I came to UTD," Clark said. "... I want to be the first one to stand up, give 'em a high five, tell 'em they did good ... I just try to really support my teammates and be a leader through actions more than words."

Clark said she finds solace in the outdoors and enjoys music, with aspirations to explore dance. Shotland recognizes Clark's drive for continuous improve-



LEFT: VEDANT SAPRA | MERCURY STAFF
RIGHT: UTD ATHLETICS | COURTESY

SEE SPOTLIGHT, PAGE 9

SCHITCO DRAWS AGAINST CARLSEN AGAIN

AAFIYA ASLAM
Mercury Staff

Economics junior Ivan Schitco repeated history on Nov. 15 at the 2023 European Team Chess Championship in Montenegro when he drew against world champion Magnus Carlsen for the second time. This is Schitco's second time drawing with Carlsen, the first being in August 2022 in the Chess Olympiad.

According to Chess Results, 38 teams participated in this tournament, each country sending four to five strong players. Schitco represented Moldova for the third time and was placed on first board this year. Carlsen was first board for Norway, and the two faces off when the two countries paired in round 5. Schitco played solidly, while

Carlsen blundered his 20-move calculation, resulting in Schitco offering a draw, which Carlsen accepted.

Alongside Schitco was graduate student IM Andrei Macovei, second board for Moldova. Other teammates included GM Viorel Iordachescu, GM Victor Bologan and FIDE Master Jegor Lashkin also played well, collectively gathering 9.5 of the 19 points in the tournament.

"[There] was a great team chemistry and team strategy in general, because they put me and Andrei, the young guys on the first and second boards to draw [with players]. And then they put the legends on the last board to make points, and it worked," Schitco said.

In the same European Team Chess Championship, business administration sophomore Gergana Peycheva — from Bulgaria — claimed the title of champion under the women's section. As board four, Peycheva won four of her games, drew three, and lost two. As a result of her contribution to the team, Bulgaria placed no. 1 out of the 32 countries in the women's section.

Moldova played against two teams from Montenegro, where both Schitco and Macovei won their games; they also defeated Israel and Azerbaijan.

"I don't think we've ever beaten Azerbaijan and in general to beat the number one seed when you're like 26 or 27 [in standing], that's basically a historic result," Schitco said. "Then we also beat Israel for the first time in history."

Schitco played the King's Indian opening against Carlsen with the white pieces, later offering a draw since there were not many pieces on the board. Despite Carlsen's efforts to create a tactical position with the black pieces in the opening, he accepted the draw as



EUROPEAN TEAM CHESS CHAMPIONSHIP | COURTESY

GM Ivan Schitco (right) and GM Magnus Carlsen (left) shaking hands before their match. Carlsen arrived 15 seconds late.

Schitco stopped his aggressive moves.

"When you try to win with the black pieces, it's pretty hard, especially against a grandmaster, so you have to like jump through hoops," Schitco said. "You have to take a lot of risks and Magnus is willing to do that."

During the game against Carlsen, Schitco said Carlsen attempted to create a mating net, but it made the position too risky for both players.

"It got really risky at one point and luckily I managed to stay calm and found all the moves that basically neutralized his play, and then he had to settle for a draw," Schitco said. "But overall, it was a great fighting game."

Schitco prepared for all openings he thought could be dangerous, as he had a feeling that he would play against Carlsen. Out of the two games Schitco played with Carlsen in 2024, he found that the game he played in the Chess Olympiad was better, as it was a complex game with a lot of blunders and brilliancies from both sides.

"Then for the openings like King's Indian... I was like if he plays that, then I just have to trust myself because the position is going to be better for me, so I have to play well," Schitco said.

"I was black there and I mean, drawing Magnus with white.. I think people do that from time to time, but draw-

ing Magnus with black when you're 300 points lower than him... it's really rare."

Schitco emphasized the feeling he had when he played against the greatest player in chess history for the second time. He also knew that Carlsen wanted to defeat him because they both drew in the Chess Olympiad, so this game was more serious.

"I don't know how many people know how good Magnus is, but it's like playing Federer in tennis or like playing against Messi ... you played with literally the best person who's ever played chess in history, and it's special," Schitco said.



GM Ivan Schitco vs. GM Magnus Carlsen, ETCC (2023)

Previous moves: 36. Kxf4, Qxg2 37. Bxg7, Kxg7

White to play. How can White prevent checkmate?

Answer: e5

White pushes the pawn on the e file to prevent Black from playing Qf6.

ESCALANTE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

"I was thinking, man I'm worse ... If I make a couple of inaccurate moves, I'm going to lose pretty soon," Escalante said. "So I need to really be alert to all my chances ... if I lose this game, I'm gonna get pretty [far] away from the GM title."

Nearing the end of the eighth game, Escalante pulled through with a move that solved all of the

issues with his position and turned the tables on GM Quesada. Because of Escalante's material advantage in the game, GM Quesada resigned.

"He got a little bit desperate because he felt like the game was going away from his hands, so he tried to play for a little, but he should have just taken the draw at this point," Escalante said. "The game was already over and he resigned."

After gaining the GM title, Escalante anticipates taking first place

with the UTD Chess team in the American Pan Ams happening on Jan. 4, 2024 in McAllen, Texas. As for individual goals, he would like to move up in rating so he can participate in the World FIDE Cup before he starts working either as a data analyst or in HR.

"I would just like to qualify and to play in the tournament that I followed as a kid," Escalante said. "I feel like that's a goal of mine."

Escalante would like to thank

his family and friends for supporting him throughout chess journey, academic endeavors and personal life. He felt that his family sacrificed themselves economically to support his participation in tournaments. As a result of their sacrifices and Escalante's efforts, he became UTD's 10th GM.

"They are my real reason for trying to keep going and keep improving in chess and in life in general," Escalante said.

SPOTLIGHT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

"My goal [is] to reach my full potential... I'm never really satisfied with my performance as a player," Clark said. "It's hard for me to celebrate wins, but I'm always looking for the next thing... to make me a better player."

Despite the recent setback at Mary Hardin-Baylor on Jan. 6, the women's basketball team rebound-

ed with a victory on Jan. 11 against East Texas Baptist with a score of 62-55. Clark remains a pivotal force and she has aided the team in winning 10 games.

"The biggest challenge would be ourselves, just getting mentally tougher, getting ready to, prepare ourselves for this next round of conferences that's coming up," Clark said. "I feel like once we get ourselves together, there's no team that we can't compete with."



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Support UT's trans legacy

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
News Editor

There was once groundbreaking support for members of the trans community in the UT system in the 1960s, but as part of Gov. Abbott's recent political strategy, the little support that survived from the sexual revolution has been whittled away. Students need to live up to this legacy of support and ensure that the most vulnerable members of society aren't left by the wayside.

Gender-affirming care is not a novel topic, even in Texas. The history of trans medical care in Texas and specifically the UT system began with the sexual revolution of the 1960s. The Gender Dysphoria Research and Service Program at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston performed its first gender-affirming surgery on a transgender woman in 1966. The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health has found no record of gender clinics in the state prior to this. The Galveston clinic continued to provide gender-affirming care through a time where being transgender was classified as a sexual deviation in the DSM-II and later a general mental illness in the DSM-III. In 1976, the clinic's leader Paul Walker came to the defense of the trans community by stating that being transgender was not a mental illness, an opinion that was wildly unpopular at the time.

The work of the gender clinic is not just a touchstone from the past; the UT system has continued to provide a variety of medical and surgical services and care to members of the transgender community for decades. UT physicians provide gender-affirming care within its clinics in the Houston area to individuals who meet the referral letter requirements procedures including surgeries, hormone treatments and speech therapy. With plans to build a new UT medical center in North Texas in Erwin, students should push for the expansion of these well-established gender clinics to our part of the state.

2023 was not a good year for legislation regarding transgender people and the queer community as a whole with the Texas legislature introducing 141 bills that target this marginalized community. SB 14, which went into effect on Sep. 1, 2023, banned drug and surgical gender-affirming care in the state of Texas for minors after a legal battle.



RAINIER PEDERSON | WEB EDITOR

And of course, SB 17 forced public institutions like UTD to eliminate their DEI programs and offices, which provided vital services and support to members of marginalized communities.

While the dissolution of ODEI will not make inclusivity unachievable, the events conducted by OCSR will not be the same as before, as they cannot explicitly relate to diversity, equity or inclusion. ODEI had just hired its first

vice president, Yvette Pearson, in 2021 during a major period of growth for the program, in large part due to donations from alumni and corporations totaling \$1 million. Now 3 years later the office is no more and its presence on the UTD website has been practically erased.

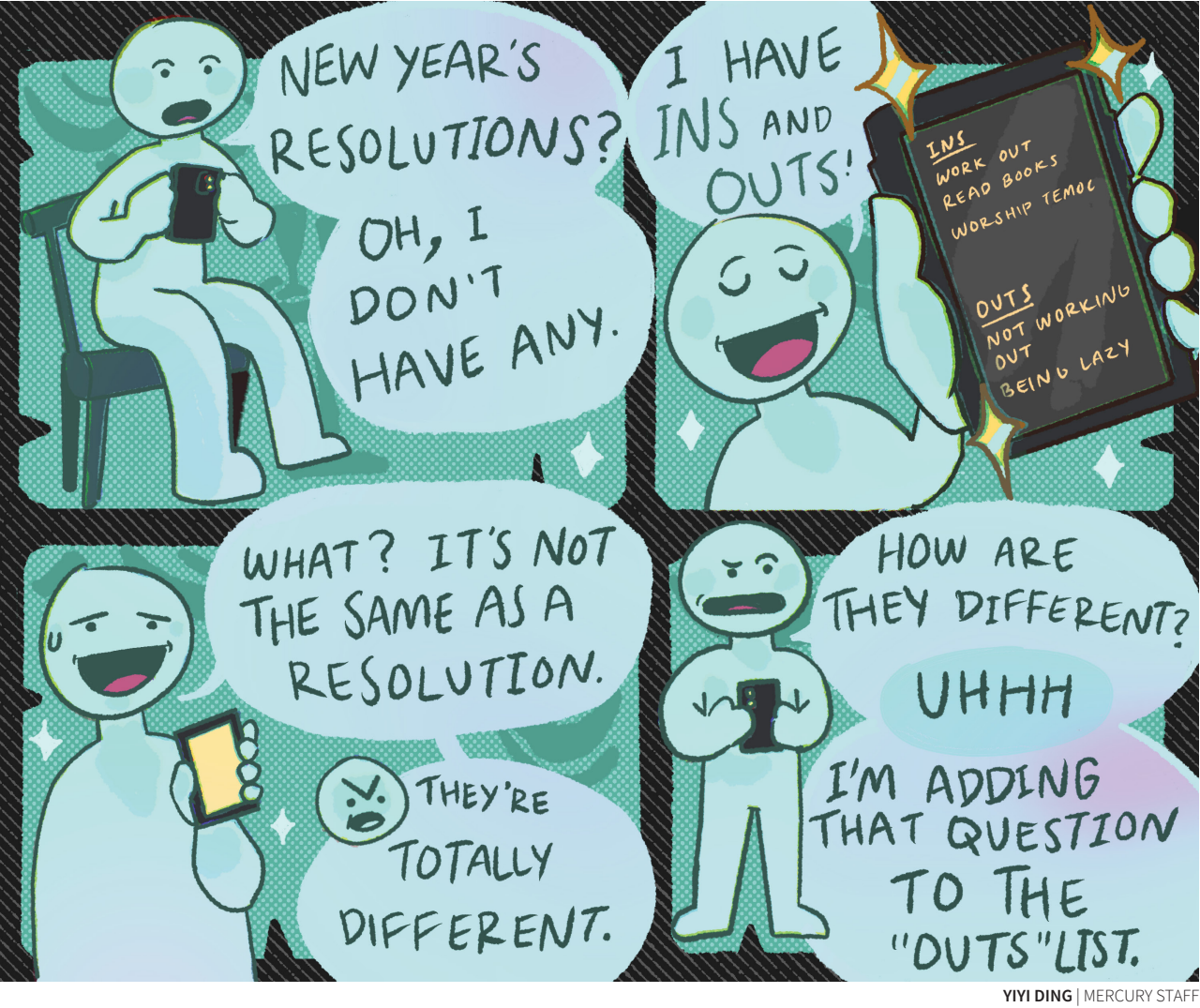
It is remarkable that in Texas, there were figures like Walker pushing for the advancement of the trans community as far back as the '60s, but it would be un-

acceptable to let that advocacy become a thing of the past. There has been an exodus of people leaving the state because Abbott and the transphobic legislators in the Texas Senate and House seek to make it impossible to live in this state and exist as trans. It is imperative that we as students continue to demonstrate support for all those that this state and the regents of its schools would see discarded and prevent this exodus from

getting worse.

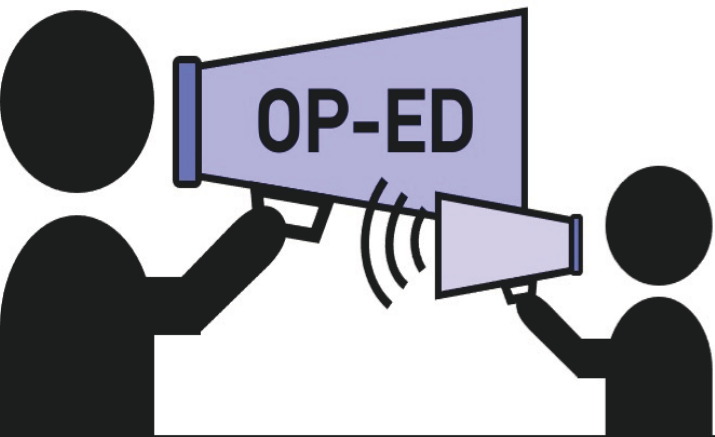
The new Office of Campus Resources and Support is just beginning, and now is the time for us to ensure that the administrators of UTD do not buckle to outside pressure and give in to the regressive demands of hateful people. The school should do the bare minimum to follow SB 17, since the protection of students should come first.

EDITORIAL CARTOON



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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